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SUBJECT: INTEGRATION AND "REPUBLICAN CITIZENSHIP" IN THE FRENCH SUBURBS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Francois Garay, the avowedly leftist mayor of Les Mureaux, a town of 32,000 inhabitants 25 miles northeast of Paris where October civil unrest left seven police officers injured and two automobiles destroyed, explicitly rejected economic, racial, and religious explanations as the central causes of France's simmering social tension. He highlighted instead the nation's failure to inculcate in its youth a clear and abiding sense of "secular Republic" citizenship. In an effort to replace this lost structure, the mayor has proposed a range of activities and "initiating moments" he believes could serve as a model for providing future French citizens with the sense of shared experience and civic education that is currently lacking.
END SUMMARY.

Decrying a Lack of Republican "Citizenship Scaffolding"

¶2. (SBU) On November 30, Poloff and LES called on Francois Garay, Mayor of Les Mureaux, a town of 32,000 inhabitants 25 miles northeast of Paris where October civil unrest left seven police officers injured and two automobiles destroyed. Mayor Garay spent the first few minutes of our meeting laying out some of the causes for social tensions in Les Mureaux. A nearby automobile factory, opened 35 years ago, had attracted a wave of recent immigrants, many of whom arrived with large extended families, in search of unskilled jobs. The mayor emphasized that several of these early arrivals were polygamists, a factor that intensified the subsequent population explosion of second- and third-generation, unskilled, poorly integrated town inhabitants.

¶3. (SBU) Garay asserted that this demographic trend coincided with the failure of current French leaders to provide critical "citizenship scaffolding" to a new generation of culturally diverse French citizens. In his own statement of the central problem, "The current generation of those in authority in France, myself included, have inadvertently failed to provide crucial 'initiating moments' that have in the past served to instill Republican citizenship values...Our secular Republic must be universal and must provide a common structure to its citizens, lives, regardless of national origin, religion, social milieu, or family status."

¶4. (SBU) Garay followed up his general diagnosis of France's malady with a list of specific remedies. In a program that he has shopped around to the senior members of parties on both the political right and left, Garay recommends a series of sequential activities that would impart vocational skills, Republican values, and a common basis of experience to reinforce a shared sense of belonging in French youth.

¶5. (U) Prominent among Garay's programmatic suggestions are:

-- A program of hands-on civic education for younger students including a Children's Municipal Council, public

works projects, and structured field trips in cooperation with the public and private sector.

-- A job fair and apprenticeship program allowing high school-aged students to sample vocational options including a required summer of employment.

-- A "citizen passport" issued to all 18-year-olds involving a summer of mandatory public service in another area of the country.

¶6. (SBU) Garay expressed anger and frustration over the police raids in Les Mureaux subsequent to October's violence and claimed to have been excluded from security forces, planning. "The police chief never alerted me (about the raids)...only the town commissioner told me about them eight hours in advance because we are on good personal terms." When asked who organized the raids, Garay responded, "I don't know if it was Sarkozy, and I really don't give a damn. But this (raid) is about media hype. It is not worthy of a secular Republic." Commenting on last year's more widespread civil unrest and its media coverage, Garay expounded on his frustration that nationally televised images of rioters only compounded the problem. "We're walking along the razor's edge. You work (on addressing the real causes of this problem) and, in three minutes of footage on the eight o'clock news, they are going to destroy all my efforts."

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Garay's approach is typical for a mayor of the left (Socialist or Communist) who must reconcile idealism and dogma with difficult on-the-ground realities. The result is often policies and initiatives that stress inclusion rather than retribution. Whether this is sufficient -- in a high unemployment, low growth environment, and in the face of persistent discriminatory practices -- is open to question.

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